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CC:
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Insults lobbed in fracking dispute

By Jeff Montgomery
News Journal

From the safety of the sheltering but obviously gassy green hills north of Scranton, Pennsylvania's environmental secretary lobbed a bizarre insult toward Delaware.

Miffed by neighboring state refusals to support new Delaware River Basin Commission rules for treating natural gas well wastewater, Republican Michael Krancer told a Wayne County business group that Delaware didn't really have a dog in the fight and claimed that the First State "smells like the tail of a dog."

It was the latest discharge of ire from a Pennsylvania Republican administration that is chafing under regional restrictions on "fracking" -- a drilling method that uses large amounts of high-pressure, chemical- and sand-laced water to free natural gas from deep rock layers generally known as the Marcellus Shale.

Krancer was quoted by the Wayne Independent last week as saying he was troubled by the DRBC's failure to act on needed regulations. He claimed the issue was "being driven by the governor of Delaware" and said that he is "not confident the voters of Delaware are going to make the right decision" when choosing the next governor.

Gov. Jack Markell, a Democrat, said in a controversial and closely watched decision in November that he was not convinced that draft regulations would sufficiently protect basin waterways and downstream interests. The state's position led the DRBC to postpone action on the issue, a decision that affected parts of Delaware, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania.

"I'm not sure the governor gives a frack about his comments," Brian Selander, spokesman for Markell, said Thursday. "Pennsylvania's chief environmental officer spewing noxious rhetoric into Delaware does little to inspire confidence that his office has the inclination or competence to ensure this drilling is done in a manner that protects Delaware's water resources."

Krancer, speaking in the heart of Marcellus Shale country, said of Delaware, "sometimes they smell like the tail of a dog. And [the state] is shaped like a dog with a tail. This is the tail wagging the dog."

(Page 2 of 2)

A press aide on Thursday would say only that Krancer's comments "speak for themselves."

Maya van Rossum, who directs the Delaware Riverkeeper, a multistate conservation and environmental group, described Krancer's comments as a "disgraceful and embarrassing" attack.

"There can be no justification for this kind of filthy and denigrating language targeted at the public officials and the citizens of an entire state, particularly when the efforts being spurned are those that are protecting the health and safety of citizens throughout the region," van Rossum said.

Margie Alt, executive director of the group Environment America, also challenged Krancer's words.

"Whose interests does Secretary Krancer represent when he makes such baseless, simplistic accusations?" Alt asked in an email. "And why is the PA DEP Secretary taking such eyebrow-raising positions when gas drilling has helped lead to drinking water advisories for nearly 325,000 residents near Pittsburgh, well water contamination in the town of Dimock and pollution in pristine streams and Pennsylvania's state forests?"

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